



# Coastwatchers

*Eurobodalla's voice for nature*

NSW Government Forest Monitoring Steering Committee  
C/- Natural Resources Commission  
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Email: [nrc@nrc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nrc@nrc.nsw.gov.au)

c/o Todd Maher, Director – Programs

14 August 2020

## **Submission to NRC re Citizens Science Strategy**

NSW Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program

Dear NRC Forest Monitoring Steering Committee

Coastwatchers commends the NRC for engaging with Australian Citizens Science Association on the development of a Citizens Science Strategy, as per the Commission's [forest monitoring](#) web page.

We endorse the Chair of Atlas of Life - Libby Hepburn's submission on the NatureMapR app, to the NRC as detailed following this letter. Coastwatchers also advises this digital platform/app be linked to the bionet and integrated with the EPA who have oversight over compliance with logging in state forests.

Although Citizen's Science is commendable, as locals have local knowledge and provide coverage and are key stakeholders as they live next to State Forests, the use of Citizens Science must be in conjunction with fully funded university scientific research into environmental and wildlife recovery following bushfire exacerbated by climate change.

### **1. Citizen's Science Project Concepts**

- Citizens scientists to utilise a digital mobile [NatureMapR](#) style database/app to directly report Threatened Species flora and fauna sightings, and other state forest environmental features (eg trees with hollows, giant trees, rocky outcrops etc) that trigger environmental protection measures, that moderators upload to bionet and forestry digital records as relevant.

Libby Hepburn ([libby@atlasoflife.org.au](mailto:libby@atlasoflife.org.au)) from NatureMapR and Michael Mulvany from the ACT government can advise on NatureMapR and Coastwatchers can advise on Forestry matters.

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- This to be linked to citizens science reporting to the EPA for forestry compliance. The above digital platform/app to act as a Plain English guide to forestry rules ,which in the southern region is the [CIFOA](#) rules. This would be modelled as an adoption/expansion of the [Victorian EPA Littering App](#).
- Location of hollow bearing trees, giant trees and other environmental features that Forestry digitally map on the FC Mapp App in active logging compartments to be made accessible to the community. **The FC Map App data** is currently kept secret from the public who are conducting citizens science to ensure compliance of environmental protection measures.

## 2. Accurate up to date FCNSW Public Information Requirement to allow community monitoring.

The forestry portal <https://planportal.fcnsw.net/> designed to provide the community with information has multiple failings. The following are just some of the issues that have been identified as needing to be addressed:

- **Timely accurate notification of forest compartments approved for logging** (so community can conduct pre-logging surveys). FCNSW Portal has many compartments due for logging ie planning stage in 2020 - too many to be feasible

**Example:** FCNSW have advised locals in 2020 that Bodalla State Forest Compartment 3005A (planning status) next to Princes Highway and Bodalla Park Drive properties and Bodalla State Forest Compartment 3004 (scheduled status) next to Lake Brou and Eurobodalla NP should not be listed for logging, however they are up on the portal as in the planning and scheduled stage.

- **Six months' notice of compartment becoming active for genuine community consultation.**  
Not start logging one business day after harvest plan published.  
Don't just notify immediate neighbours.
- **Make forestry information on portal accessible without a login** and you login to register for status updates only.  
Login problematic as people simply cannot register to get into information.  
(portal failing).
- **When forest was previously logged information** to actually be on Forestry Portal (portal failing)
- **Forestry digital mapping of hollow bearing trees on FC Map App to be made available to the public.** The loss of 26 trees in a short sample area led to the Stop Work Order at South Brooman on 23 July and FCNSW suspending logging in Mogo State Forest compartment 173/161 on 13 August following community surveying of trees cut down with hollows.

- **Easy access to geo-referenced versions of the harvest plan maps** the community can import into Avenza for use in the field (to determine location of exclusion zones on the ground). The harvest plan map is currently part of a harvest plan pdf.
- **Forestry Portal, Native Forestry map viewer and EPA Bionet are independent.** Need to look up each information for each compartment one by one in the Forestry Portal. Then need to export information from Native Forestry map viewer and EPA Bionet and overlay onto harvest plan map. The information from the Native Forest map Viewer and the EPA bionet need to be available in shapefiles. All three sets of information need to be integrated.

**Information about threatened species in logging compartments used to be printed on the harvest plan map as occurred previously.** Now the public has to log into Bionet.

### FCNSW Ecological Surveying

- **Do not rely on harvesters to do environmental surveying** (as 23 July 2020 [Stop Work Order](#) in South Brooman Compartment 58 and suspension of logging on 12 August of Mogo 173/161 (Attachment B) demonstrates contractors do not retain trees as required.

*Harvest Plan South Brooman 58 - 5. Operational Responsibilities*

*Where it is deemed unsafe to walk through a patch, the broad area patch may be undertaken using a UAV...**In these situations, the harvesting crew is responsible for identifying and recording all retained trees**".*

Do contractors ever look in a tree for koalas/bird nests etc?

**Evidence: How many environmental features have contractors actually advised of?**

- **Independent Flora and Fauna assessments before and after logging by independent ecologists** as Victoria does – not by FCNSW which has a conflict of interest to meet supply.

### FCNSW and EPA to formally QA Contractor Work (not leave it community whistle blowers)

- Both FCNSW and EPA should have conducted QA on contractor work that started in bushfire affected operations from mid March 2020 for compliance. The EPA Stop Work was affected on 23 July in South Brooman Cpt 58 four long months after starting and suspension of work in Mogo State Forest Compartment 173/161 occurred on 13 August five months after commencement.
- Non-compliant contractors no longer be used - key demand from social media.
- New contractors to have work supervised by FCNSW then QAed after one day unsupervised work.

### Community Engagement

- **NRC, FCNSW and EPA to have formal community involvement on committees.**

- Public invitation from FCNSW to community to conduct citizen science surveys twelve months prior after FCNSW ecologist surveying and markup with community access to all results on FCCNSW Map App.

Yours sincerely

Secretary- Coastwatchers Association Incorporated

**Attachment A:** Libby Hepburn Submission to NRC Citizens Science Review 14 August 2020

Dear Natural Resources Commission and ACSA,

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the draft Citizen Science Strategy for the Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program.

The Citizen Science Strategy which is being proposed here is a first for Australia in terms of a partnership approach to data gathering to support ecologically sustainable forest management. Other environmental management agencies across the globe have been working with their communities for many years now, so there are good examples which can inform the Steering Committee on good practice and successful initiatives.

It is very worthwhile to instigate a process which includes community at the heart of the work which needs to be undertaken to: “ *Independently oversee and advise on a state-wide monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement program for NSW forests to adaptively manage NSW forests across tenures in an ecologically sustainable manner*”.

This new and forward looking approach, if developed in a co-creative way and undertaken with adherence to the fundamental citizen science Principles outlined,;

- Roles - clarifying and communicating relationship roles and expectations (both science and citizen);
- Inclusive - maximising opportunities to participate from a diverse range of people, stakeholders, organisations, skills and disciplines;
- Meaningful - reinforcing that participant contributions are meaningful and necessary;
- Partnership – developing partnerships with equity, transparency and mutual benefit;
- Trust - building mutual trust and respect;
- Learning – creating an atmosphere of learning and innovation, together with a sharing of skills; and
- Science output - ensuring there is a science output and that the science is valid and relevant and has some measurable outcomes.

will deliver not just valuable data, but also understanding and buy-in (from the citizen science community) to any proposed management improvements that are evidence based.

If an extra Outcome of : 4. Evidence-based decision making influenced by research results was added, this would make a really powerful and innovative framework for this work.

I commend the NRC and ACSA for proposing a long term process which will improve significantly not only the environmental management outcomes, but also the attitude of the community to the work of the Forest Monitoring and Improvement Program.

In terms of the resources that could be harnessed in partnership for this work, we have a regional biodiversity monitoring program the Atlas of Life, which has been building a database of biodiversity from Wonboyn to Moruya and inland to the Great Dividing Range, and which has to date contributed to the Atlas of Living Australia 343,937 moderated sightings of 6,299 species by 807 members in 8 years, and which is part of a network encompassing 6 other projects using the NatureMapr platform, from Albury Wodonga to Kiama and the Southern Highlands. We have been actively seeking to engage with scientists to undertake meaningful projects based on our communities of practice, but until now, any engagement outside the ACT has been very ad hoc. We have a platform where our data is linked seamlessly to the national and global biodiversity databases, a community experienced in recording and interested in our regional ecology who, especially after last season’s bushfires, want to do something to contribute to their own and our

natural resource managers' understanding of the processes involved and what needs to be done to manage, restore and protect our increasingly at risk habitats and biodiversity, which of course means particularly our forests.

Obviously the fundamental truth is that citizen science is a voluntary activity which people engage in only when they deem it interesting and worthwhile, so much work needs to be undertaken initially to convince everyone, that what is being proposed is in reality what is wanted by government. That will be the key task of the NRC and ACSA as it goes about establishing this radical new partnership. There are a number of citizen science practitioners and groups which have many years of experience and who, if they are approached as partners in a process of co-creation(another principle of citizen science), could be powerful advocates for this initiative.

One of the most important aspects will what happens around the data. I have been working for a number of years on the data aspects of citizen science and the SDGs, and more recently on citizen science and open science, so I well understand that the work and the approach that is being proposed in the strategy is of basic importance. I would like to explore those aspects outlined in Objective 1. Connect the data - to explore whether and how FAIR data principles(Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable), will be adhered to. I am interested to understand whether the work proposed will be designed so that contribution to the SDGs will be an objective? Not easy, but this again could be an important element in future support.

In conclusion, I would like to say how impressed I am by this citizen science strategy and that I would commend you who have proposed it as it is a very different and much needed change of approach. I am confident that citizen science individuals and communities will be interested in supporting what you are working towards.

With all good wishes,

Libby

Libby Hepburn (Chair)

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[co-chair SDG and Citizen Science Maximisation group](#)

[co-chair Open Science and Citizen Science CoP](#)

**ACSA**/Citizen Science Global Partnership Liaison

## Attachment B:

### Plan Status History

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Plan Name	Plan Status	Created At
HPRP_MOGO_161A_173A_2020	Suspended	Thu Aug 13 2020 23:24:54 GMT+1000 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)
HPRP_MOGO_161A_173A_2020	Active	Fri May 22 2020 01:01:33 GMT+1000 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)
HPRP_MOGO_161A_173A_2020	Approved	Tue May 12 2020 00:22:09 GMT+1000 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)
HPRP_MOGO_161A_173A_2020	Planning	Fri Apr 24 2020 21:31:08 GMT+1000 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)